



NOAA Damage Assessment, Remediation, and Restoration Program



Protecting and restoring natural resources - and the local economies that depend on them

Thousands of oil spills and hazardous waste sites contaminate our nation's coasts. Some of their effects are immediate and clearly visible, such as oiled shorelines, dead wildlife, closed fisheries, and lost recreation. Others, such as declines in wildlife reproduction or contaminated sediments causing tumors in fish, are less obvious and require expertise and time to properly evaluate. Cleaning up contaminants released into the environment, assessing impacts, and restoring injured resources are best achieved through a cooperative, integrated approach.

From injury to restoration, NOAA is there

NOAA's Damage Assessment, Remediation, and Restoration Program (DARRP) collaborates with other agencies, industry, and citizens to protect coastal and marine resources, respond to pollution incidents, assess risks and injuries, and restore those resources when injured. After an oil spill or hazardous substance release, NOAA's team of scientists, economists, restoration experts, and attorneys—

1. Work on-site during an emergency to collect time-sensitive data
2. Coordinate with and advise clean-up agencies, including the Coast Guard and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to ensure NOAA trust resources are adequately evaluated and protected during clean-up
3. Determine the extent and magnitude of environmental injuries and lost services
4. Define the type and scope of restoration best suited to address these injuries
5. Work cooperatively with the responsible party or pursue other strategies to resolve natural resource liability
6. Implement projects to restore the affected resources and their services to the public or oversee and monitor projects implemented by others

For nearly two decades, DARRP has worked cooperatively with federal and state agencies, tribes, industry, and communities.

Program Results—

Restored/protected 6300 acres of habitat (includes wetland, beach, pond, soft bottom, hard bottom, and upland)

Helped generate more than \$300 million for restoration to—

- Remove river blockages restoring access to fish spawning habitat
- Restore oiled wetlands
- Reattach broken coral
- Create oyster reefs and other shellfish habitats
- Create or restore estuarine intertidal areas and marshes
- Acquire, restore, and protect waterfowl habitat
- Conduct sea turtle recovery and monitoring programs

Working Cooperatively

NOAA's DARRP encourages responsible parties to participate in cooperative damage assessment and restoration planning activities. By focusing on restoration early in the site assessment process, we integrate remediation and restoration, and offer industry a practical and cost-effective way to resolve liability. In addition to working cooperatively with responsible parties at oil spills and hazardous release sites, DARRP regularly convenes industry, government, and conservation groups to identify methods for improving assessments, reducing costs, and restoring resources faster and more effectively. Through such innovative partnerships, NOAA is reversing the effects of coastal contamination and ensuring that the environment is restored.

SNAPSHOTS OF SUCCESS

LAVACA BAY, TEXAS

Since 1948, Alcoa has operated a manufacturing facility on the eastern shore of Lavaca Bay, Point Comfort, Texas. This facility released mercury into the water, contaminating bay sediments, fish and shellfish. In 1986, state health officials closed part of the bay to fishing to prevent consumption of contaminated seafood. NOAA, the U.S. Department of the Interior, and Texas (the Trustees for this incident) worked cooperatively with Alcoa and EPA to collect data on resources injured and ongoing ecological risks from the contamination. This was completed during EPA's Remedial Investigation and Risk Assessment to develop clean-up plans for the site. As a result of this cooperation, remediation (clean-up) and restoration planning were combined, saving time and money.

Trustees included local citizen input when developing restoration plans for all identified resource losses, including projects that would best address recreational fishing losses. Under a settlement with the Trustees, Alcoa is now implementing all restoration projects finally selected—

- Create an oyster reef
- Restore a large tract of marsh
- Build or improve several recreational fishing piers and boat ramps

PATUXENT RIVER, MARYLAND

In April 2000, a Potomac Electric Power Company (PEPCO) oil pipeline ruptured beneath a marsh on a Maryland tributary. Roughly 140,000 gallons of heavy fuel oil flowed over the marsh and down the Patuxent River, oiling about 40 miles of environmentally sensitive creeks and shorelines.

Working together, NOAA, PEPCO, and co-Trustees assessed the injured natural resources. The spill impacted wetlands and shorelines, birds, fish and shellfish, turtles, and benthic communities, as well as residents who were unable to boat, canoe, or kayak. Again, citizen input helped select the restoration projects—

- Create an intertidal wetland
- Enhance beach shoreline
- Restore and protect migratory bird nesting habitat
- Create an oyster sanctuary
- Build canoe/kayak paddle-in campsites
- Rebuild a boardwalk
- Provide canoes for an education program
- Establish new boat access (including a disabled accessible launch) and improve an existing boat launch ramp

In both of these cases, the cooperative approach resolved the responsible party's liability, yielded restoration projects that met both resource needs and community concerns, and fostered greater trust among the natural resource agencies, the responsible party, and the local community.

Environmental Laws Addressing Contamination

Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act of 1980 (CERCLA/Superfund)

Oil Pollution Act of 1990 (OPA)

Under these statutes, two types of liability are assigned for releases of oil or hazardous substances: responsibility for cleanup of the environment (which is overseen by the lead cleanup agency) and responsibility for addressing injury to natural resources (which is overseen by natural resource trustees). Natural resource trustees include tribal governments as well as state and federal agencies. As a natural resource trustee, NOAA acts on behalf of the public to protect and restore coastal and marine resources and their services. Natural resources include fish, plants, birds, other wildlife and their habitats, soil, and both surface and groundwater.

